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RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 001252

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SUBJECT: JAPAN-ROK VICE MINISTER'S MEETING: "CONVIVIAL AND  
CONSTRUCTIVE"

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Both MOFA and ROK Embassy describe ROK VFM  
Cho Joong-pyo,s March 12-13 meeting with Japan VFM Yachi in  
Tokyo as "convivial" and "constructive." The two men, who  
focused on a broad range of issues as part of the fourth  
annual Japan-ROK strategic dialogue, reached no new  
agreements. On bilateral issues, Cho asked Japan to:

- 1) insulate the bilateral relationship from potential  
disagreements that might exacerbate tensions.
- 2) recognize unresolved problems of Japan's history.
- 3) maintain close cooperation on the North Korean nuclear  
issue, and
- 4) take steps to enhance regional cooperation in Northeast  
Asia.

¶2. (C) Yachi attempted to lay the groundwork for a bilateral  
relationship resistant to disruptions from short-term  
political factors and nationalist sentiments. Despite  
agreeing on numerous aspects of the relationship, Tokyo and  
Seoul continue to differ on how to integrate the problems of  
history into the current relationship. On comfort women,  
Yachi reiterated Japan's commitment to the Kono Statement  
while Cho urged Tokyo to "cool down" loud voices calling for  
a revision to the statement. Yachi also raised concerns  
about the rapid development of PRC-South Korea relations.  
End Summary.

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Meetings with Aso and Shiozaki  
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¶3. (C) On March 16, MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Northeast  
Asia Deputy Director Mari Akiyama and ROK Embassy First  
Secretary Kang Young-hoon provided similar readouts of ROK

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Vice Foreign Minister Cho Jung-pyo,s March 11-13 visit to  
Tokyo. His visit marked the fourth annual strategic dialogue  
between the ROK and Japan. Cho paid courtesy calls on FM Aso

and Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki, and held roundtable discussions with Japanese journalists and academics, before meeting Yachi. Akiyama and Kang, both of whom noted that Cho served three previous tours in Tokyo, said that while Cho and Yachi spoke in their respective languages during the meeting, the ROK VFM felt comfortable enough with Japanese that he did not need to wait for the Japanese-Korean translation before responding.

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Bilateral Relations  
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¶4. (C) Cho cited three major reasons for the importance of bilateral relations: 1) both countries share crucial values such as democracy, a market economy, and an alliance with the U.S., 2) Tokyo and Seoul must work together to secure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, and 3) Japan and the ROK are key partners in regional cooperation.

¶5. (C) Cho related four "must do's" required to maintain a harmonious relationship: 1) insulate the bilateral relationship from potential disagreements that might exacerbate tensions, 2) get Tokyo to recognize unresolved problems of Japan's history, 3) maintain close cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue, and 4) take steps to enhance regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

¶6. (C) According to Akiyama, Yachi agreed with Cho on the importance of strengthening bilateral relations, observing that Japanese and Korean ministers have visited each others countries sixtimes so far in 2007. Yachi attempted to lay the groundwork for a bilateral relationship resistant to disruptions from short-term political factors and nationalist sentiments, Akiyama explained. Tokyo, the VFM observed,

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wants to prevent existing problems, e.g., Liancourt Rocks, EEZ negotiations, and fisheries, from further agitating relations. The Japan side agreed to take measures for resolving problems of the past, including the issue of Koreans who remain on Sakhalin Island after being stranded there at the end of the Second World War.

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Past and Future  
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¶7. (C) Despite agreeing on numerous aspects of the relationship, Tokyo and Seoul continue to differ on how to integrate the problems of history into the current relationship, Kang and Akiyama both noted. Yachi stressed the need for a future-oriented perspective. Japanese interlocutors said that the current relationship could not be considered future-leaning while South Korea continued to stress past wrongs. Kang said that Cho told Yachi that Seoul hoped to strike a balanced approach - one that did not forget the past but which was nevertheless ready to address the future.

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Comfort Women  
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¶8. (C) Yachi reiterated Japan's position that there had been no change in its stance on comfort women, and that Tokyo would continue to abide by the Kono statement. Efforts undertaken by some Diet members to revise the Kono statement were directed by the LDP, not the government, Yachi observed. Cho urged Yachi to help "cool down" the loud voices calling for a revision to the statement. The comfort women issue, Cho noted, is a source of great shame for Korean women, as well as for Korean men. Cho also expressed some frustration with Japan's failure to appoint representatives to a joint research committee which Japan and Korea agreed to form to investigate historical claims. Akiyama acknowledged that

Tokyo had been slow to appoint members.

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Nuclear Issues  
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¶9. (C) Yachi briefed Cho on the status of the Japan-DPRK Working Group discussions. The Japanese told Cho that little progress had been made on the abduction issue because the DPRK had insisted that the problem had already been resolved.

According to Kang, Yachi claimed that the North Korean walkout had not been unexpected or surprising, because "these activities had been repeated before." The Japanese side, Kang continued, told Cho that it was a mistake for Seoul to believe that Japan intended to emphasize the abduction issue over denuclearization. Yachi reportedly told the Korean side that Japan wants to play a more constructive role in the Six-Party process.

¶10. (C) Cho offered a readout of the North-South ministerial which included, according to Akiyama, a ROK promise to keep the North-South talks on the same level as the Six Party Talks. The ROK side also informed Tokyo about South Korean Six-Party negotiator Chun Yung-woo's meeting with DPRK representative Kim Gye-gwan in New York, at which Chun urged Pyongyang to resolve outstanding issues with Japan.

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ROK-PRC Concerns  
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¶11. (C) Kang said that VFM Yachi raised Japanese concerns about the rapid development of PRC-South Korean relations. Kang opined that Tokyo was concerned that improved ROK-PRC relations might come at Japan's expense. Cho responded that developing relations with China were built first and foremost on the solid relationship between the U.S. and South Korea - the ROK stood firm on its ties to Washington and would

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develop its bilateral agenda with Beijing on that basis.

¶12. (C) Comment: While short on concrete results, the positive atmospherics of the Yachi-Cho meeting reflect Japan and South Korea's willingness to move bilateral relations farther along the relatively healthy trajectory they have followed since PM Abe assumed office. ROK Embassy contacts tells Embassy Tokyo that Seoul has little interest in turning the comfort women issue into another Yasukuni-type disruption. At the same time, MOFA and ROK Embassy personnel often times can barely conceal their frustration at not being able to resolve the nagging underlying differences on the interpretation of history, Liancourt Rocks, and the host of other bilateral irritants that plague relationship.  
SCHIEFFER